Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The United Nations Population Fund

THE FAMILY IN ISLAM

THE FAMILY OF FATIMA

by

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Foreword

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

The Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) which takes great interest in all groups of society, pays special attention to the young. It endeavours to prepare the way for them to appreciate their noble religion and get acquainted with the position it takes concerning given issues in society. In this respect, ISESCO's tasks have included several social and cultural projects for the benefit of youngsters, taking into consideration their wishes and interests. These projects deal with agreeable subjects that are simplified to suit their abilities and to entice them to seek further knowledge in the light of their Islamic culture.

In this series of publications, this booklet tackles the question of the "Family in Islam - the Family of Fatima" through situations dealing with the education of children, the relationship between individuals, their rights and obligations as well as the contributions of the family to society and the rights of neighbours and relatives, etc.. Thus, the morals of Islam and its call for doing good deeds, helping each other and the like, become apparent. This, in turn, is reflected in the larger Islamic society for a virtuous family is the pillar of a virtuous society.

This interest of ISESCO towards woman as -pillar of the family- and her contributions to all fields of society has been matched by that of the United Nations Population Fund. This is because concern about women is not restricted to education and health but all aspects of social and economic life, in the hope of helping women to recognize and defend their rights.

We are happy that this book has been published with the collaboration of our two institutions, and we hope that other publications will see the light under this scheme, so as to benefit more people.

Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri

Director General
Islamic Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Preface

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, and may His Peace and Blessing be on our Prophet whom Allah has sent to guide people and to invite them to have faith in Allah, and to follow the principles of Islam which guarantee happiness in this world as well as in the other.

Islam gives great importance to the family as it has laid down the foundations to secure its build-up and its righteous and fruitful development.

In this booklet, I have tried to present a clear, albeit brief, picture of the reason why Islam cares so much about the family, the way it is built, and the necessity for religion to be its primary foundation.

I have also shed some light on the rights and obligations of children, relatives, friends, neighbours, etc.

I have likewise pointed out to the great interest Islam has shown for the diffusion of education and learning and for the call to do useful work which is the basis of society's revival and progress.

I have tried to support what I say with verses from the Holy Quran , the noble Hadith, and the sayings of some of the

Prophet' s companions and followers, as well as their deeds which make every Muslim proud.

Allah is the One who grants success and the One to resort to for help.

Abduljalil Hammad.

1- Introduction

The Family in Islam occupies a very high and special place. It is the essential cell in the making of society which is in a satisfactory and happy condition when the family is, and which deteriorates when the family does.

Islam gives great importance to the family. It has traced for it the way that enables it to take care of its obligations in the making of a strong and just society where prevail the spirit of love, bliss and harmony.

The members of a Muslim family which follows the principles of its religion live in harmony and shared love. In this family, the elder member is courteous to the younger one and endeavours to lead him to the right path. The younger member likewise, respects his elders and follows their advice. The family works with sincerity to contribute to the well-being and happiness of all its members. All of them do their job as best as they can, abiding by the saying of the Almighty:

> “ Help ye one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression” (Al Ma'idah:2)*.

(*) Translator's note: All the translations of the verses of the Holy Quran came from M.M Pickthall’s translations into English of the Meaning of the Glorious Quran, published by the Islamic Call Society, Tripoli, Libya.

In what follows, we have one of these families whom we have chosen to accompany in this good and agreeable journey, and with whom we shall live for a while to get acquainted with its way of life. We shall henceforth, refer to this family as ‘the Family of Fatima’.

Fatima is the eldest child in the family which is a good and righteous one known for its clinging to the principles and values of its religion and for its generosity and moral excellence. It is a family beloved by all its neighbours and friends.

The Father in this family is a virtuous man who holds a public job and who is known among his colleagues for his sincerity, and his sense of seeking perfection in his work. He is also known for his good manners towards his colleagues.

The mother is a virtuous and decent woman who takes good care of her children. She is well informed about her religion and memorises some Suras of the Holy Quran and sayings of the Prophet. She also knows a little of the biographies of righteous men. In her family, the mother is well known for her love of good deeds, for her good relationship with her kin and those of her husband, and for her eagerness to love her neighbours.

There are three children in the family, the eldest being Fatima who is a high school student. Ahmed is in junior high school and, Alaa', the youngest, is in primary school. They are all industrious children, proficient in their studies and distinguished in their manners.

The parents in this Muslim family, like many others, do everything in their power to bring up their children well, under the principles and teachings of Islam, so that they grow up good citizens performing their duties towards themselves, their country and their Ummah in determination and sincerity.

For this reason, the father has got used to sitting with his wife and children after dinner and the prayer of Al Isha' in order to talk about religion, political or cultural matters and discuss family concerns. The parents encourage their children to express their opinions about everything and to discuss matters freely and in accordance with the Islamic principle which advocates consultation and respect for others' opinion.

Let us now start with our first step with Fatima 's family.

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2- A Happy Surprise

After she returned from school, Fatima asked her mother a permission to visit her friend and neighbour Zainab whom she had not visited as frequently as before since the time Zainab started to go to the University as she was one year ahead of her.

The mother agreed to the visit and praised Zainab and her mother saying: “They are among the best of our friends and neighbours. They have always been correct towards us. This is

why visiting them is an obligation. Please, give all her family my best regards."

Fatima left for Zainab's house where she was met with a surprise - and a happy surprise it was! There was a party for the engagement of Hanaa, Zainab's elder sister, with her neighbour Masoud.

The party was quite small and it was clear that Masoud was in a hurry as he was an enlisted soldier and was on a very short leave. He had, of course, to be back in his unit on time.

Fatima had to leave before the party was over so as not to anger her mother if she returned home late. She presented her congratulations to Hanaa' and Masoud and their family, apologized for her early departure and left the house.

When she arrived home, Fatima told her family about the engagement. They were happy about it. The mother then said smiling: "But we haven't heard the women make a single celebration sound... Say, why hasn't Zainab's mother invited us to attend the party ? Anyway, congratulating her, her daughter and her family on this happy occasion is an obligation, and I shall see to it soon, Allah willing".

Fatima then said :"The party was attended by a limited number of people, and there was plenty of time for celebration and congratulations."

That same day when the family gathered as usual for their evening discussion, Fatima talked about what she had seen at the engagement party. Her mother responded: “It will be a happy and successful engagement, Allah willing. Hanaa' is indeed a polite and kind girl and her fiancé Masoud is a good and virtuous young man. People like them cannot but be happy in their lives by the Grace of Allah the Almighty.”

The father remarked : “The girl indeed has very good qualities. She is a good match for her fiancé who is, I know, an upright, religious and well mannered young man. This is a good beginning for the building of a happy and successful family. Allah willing.”

The father continued saying: “I liked very much what I heard from Fatima about Zainab's sense of economy in the engagement party. What we now observe is the despiteful fact that certain families overspend in their engagement celebrations, with no respect for the guidance of our religion, and thus digress from the true aim of marriage. These families now offer expensive dowries, spend a lot of money on the engagement and wedding parties and on the furnishing of the bride and groom's house and so on. This has made this state of affairs look more like a business transaction than a sacred marriage union to be beneficial to the parties concerned.”

Ahmed asked his father in amazement :“Does that mean that religion does not require a dowry for the bride and that it forbids wedding parties ?”

The father replied with some detail so that everybody could understand : “Allah Most High has set a dowry in marriage to show that it is noble and praiseworthy, but this dowry should not be exaggerated.” The Prophet, may peace and blessing be upon him, has prescribed a party for the wedding, but at the same time warns against excess. He says: ‘The most blessed marriage is the least costly’”.

Fatima inquired about the right principle which young men and women should make use of to choose their partners for marriage.

The father stopped to think for a while and then replied : “Choosing a partner is one of the most crucial things that can happen in the life of a man or a woman. This is why a partner should be chosen with great care abiding by one's reason and not by one's heart in this choice. Islam advocates that the first principle in this choice be righteousness and virtue. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, says : “Life is enjoyment and the best enjoyment in it is a virtuous wife.”

In another Hadith, he says : “Didn't I tell you about what is best for man ? A virtuous wife : While he sees her, he feels happy,, while he is absent, she protects his honour and while he asks her to do something she complies”.

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, exhorts marriage with pious women and says: “A woman is to

be married for four reasons : for her money, for her beauty, for her descent, and for her religion. Marry the one who is pious. God Bless you".

No other religion exhorts marriage more than Islam does because marriage is the pillar of the family, and a strong family is the pillar of society. Moreover, marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman which elevates humans but not animals, for Allah Most high says :

> "And of His signs is this : He created for you mates from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect". (Al Rum : 21).

As for those people who ignore the precepts of Islam and flee from marriage allowed by Allah to pursue their satanic desires and degraded lives, they denature their humanness which the Lord has bestowed upon them and prefer to live a beastly life, thus displeasing Allah. This is so because a good person finds real peace nowhere but in marriage based on love and compassion. A matrimonial home is the garden where a person finds peace, refuge, and spiritual satisfaction.

The mother responded to her husband's words, directing her comments to her children : "Marriage as we have heard is a blessing for the spouses, but that does not mean that they should follow leisure and enjoyment and ignore their social responsibilities which religion demands of them. Undoubtedly,

there are great obligations in marriage, but these are for the benefit of man. They include children's rights, their education, their upbringing, as well as caring about the family, doing good deeds, providing guidance and making an honest living.”

At this stage of the discussion, Alaa' started yawning. He glanced at his watch half asleep and said : “It is time to go to bed. So let us all do, and postpone the subject of raising and educating children till tomorrow, Allah willing.” He then wished everybody good night and went to his room.

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3 - Islam and the Education of Children

One evening, after the family had finished their prayer of Al Isha' and had dinner, Fatima said: “We agreed last night that our discussion this evening will be about raising and educating children. I hope we can start now because it seems that the subject has many ramifications and needs a lot of time to discuss.”

Alaa' laughed and said : “Let us begin right away before we all fall asleep.” He looked around him and asked:“Where's dad?”. Then, he rushed to his parents' room to call his father. When he returned, his sister Fatima asked him :“Did you ask permission before you entered your parents' room?” He replied that he didn't. Fatima advised: “Ethics of Islam requires that

you request permission before you enter your parents' room". After a while, the father arrived and they all sat down around the dinner table.

The father began saying : "A Muslim family which follows the morals and principles of Islam prides itself in giving its children from a very early age, a true Muslim education based on faith and moral excellence. We now notice young children perform their prayers on time, go to the mosque with their parents to perform their prayers , especially on Friday and the holidays of Al-Fitr and Al Adha , as well as in the month of Ramadan.

Young children now practice fasting at a very early age so that when they get older, they find it easy and enjoyable. They are interested in cultural and religious programmes which they follow on the radio or television, and learn about moral principles, good behaviour. and commendable Islamic values. They participate in some of the contests presented in these programmes and read newspapers and magazines suitable for their age.

Of course, the family wishes not only to educate the children in religious teachings, but also to give them good knowledge by sending them to schools and universities and similar institutions. It is with knowledge that individuals, families and societies progress.

Islam urges Muslims to learn and gain knowledge. Almighty Allah says in this respect:

> "Allah will exalt those who believe among you and those who have knowledge to high ranks" (Al Mujadalah:11).

He also says:

> "Are those who know equal with those who know not?" (Azzumar:9).

Likewise, the Prophet, may the Peace of Allah and His Blessing be upon him, says : "He who strives to gain knowledge, Allah will make the path to paradise easy for him".

He also says: "Seeking knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim man and woman".

The Family that takes care of its children from a very early age is only following in this the example set by the Prophet, Peace and Blessing be upon him, the Caliphs and the righteous in the Ummah. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, used to tend the children of his companions while in their prime of life, show them sympathy and courtesy, and provide them with advice and recommendations. Some of these children, such as Abdullah Bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Umar, and Abdullah bin Azzubeir, became very important people later in their lives.

Let us now hear one of these men, Abdullah bin Abbas, talk about a piece of advice, the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, once gave him :

One day I was behind the Prophet, may the Blessings and Peace of Allah be upon him, and he said to me: “Young man, I shall teach you some words of advice: Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. If you ask, ask Allah; if you seek help, seek help of Allah. Notice that even all the people agree to benefit you, it will be realized only if Allah has it prescribed for you, and that if they gather together to harm you with anything, they would harm you only with something Allah had already prescribed for you”.

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4 - A Party at Ahmed's School

One day, Ahmed's father was invited to attend a party in his son's school, and was very happy with the religious, cultural and sports events that he witnessed there and in which Ahmed took part. He was also glad to hear the teachers praise his son for his politeness, assiduity and good manners towards everybody.

In the evening, during the regular family meetings, the father spoke about what he saw at school and praised the pupils there : I was pleased with everything I saw at school

today. I liked the religious activities and the prayer room as well as the library. I was also pleased with the sports activities and I hope that the concern paid to these activities will continue. In fact, physical education plays an important role in preparing youngsters for a happy life.

Islam calls Muslim families to have a strong faith as well as a strong and healthy body, so that they become fit in all respects, capable of facing life with assurance and determination. Our religion looks up to a strong and capable society, not to a weak and defeated one.

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, says : “A strong believer is better loved by Allah than a weak believer, and each of them has good features.’ By strength here are meant the different situations that give force to Islam and strengthen its principles. Situations like these are often met by intellectuals and politicians who strive to encourage people to know more about religion and to convince them of the loftiness of Islam. But we should not forget that ‘a sane mind is in a sane body’, and that sports are the best means to keep the body in good shape and fitness. Likewise, Umar Ibn Alkhattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said : ‘teach your children swimming and bowing and leaping on to horses’”.

The father continued saying :“I liked the pupil who gave the opening speech to such a large audience. He was courageous and sure of himself. He reminds me of the stories

we read about youngsters like him who are self-confident and proud of themselves.”

“Like who ?”, inquired Fatima.

“Like Abdullah Ibn Azzubeir when he was a child”, replied the father and went on to say :“One day, the Commander of the Faithful, Umar Ibn Alkhattab, came across some boys playing in the street. When they saw him, they ran away to clear the way for him, except Abdullah Ibn Azzubeir who did not move. So, Umar Ibn Alkhattab asked him :“Why didn't you run away like your friends ?” The boy replied :“ Why should I ? I didn't commit any crime to be afraid of you, and the street is not too narrow to walk through.”

Umar was pleased with the boy's courage and felt sure he would have a good future. In fact Abdullah Ibn Azzubeir became one of the greatest Muslim leaders well known for his courage and valour in battle.”

The family members smiled on Abdullah' courageous act. The father continued saying: “This is the way our children grow up; they do so in the light of the right Islamic guidelines bestowed by our beloved Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, and the great Caliphs after him.”

Alaa' said smiling to his father: “I read this fascinating story in a book I got from our school library”.

And the mother to comment :“I am very glad that you like reading, Alaa'. Reading is, of course, one of the best hobbies and is of the greatest benefit to man. It makes him an educated and respected person in society”.

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5 - Family Day

As the celebration of Family Day was approaching, there was a lot of talk in the media about the merits of parents, their obligation to give heed to their children, as well as about the family in general and its happiness in particular.

Many a time had Fatima's family members gathered to listen to the radio or watch television to follow the programmes set for the occasion of this holiday. They have also read about it in the newspapers and magazines.

One day they followed a television programme where the speaker was saying : “Islam pays such a great attention to the concern about parents to the extent that it makes of their obedience an obligation that comes right after that of obeying and worshipping Allah. Moreover, Islam has traced the way to caring about parents, especially when they reach old age and become unable to carry on their duties as they used to. They are in this case in most need to be shown attention, kindness, love and affection.

Of the good manners towards parents, we may cite :

- Not to raise one's voice when speaking to them ;
- Not to start eating or drinking before they do ;
- Not to sit down or stand up before they do, and not to precede them while walking ;
- Not to call them by their names without the use of "Father" and "Mother" ;
- Not to go away or travel without their consent ;
- Not to treat them with violence or use with them words that may hurt their feelings ;
- To pray for Allah's mercy on them, they who took care of us from our birth to the moment we became self dependent".

Here is guidance from the Holy Quran in this respect :

"Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain to old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word. And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: My Lord ! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little". (Al Isra': 23-24)

Similarly a noble Hadith says: “The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, was asked : “Which deed is most loved by Allah? He replied, ‘To perform prayers at their right time’ Then, he was asked : ‘What next?’ He replied ‘To be good and dutiful to one's parents’. He was then asked : ‘What next?’ He replied : ‘To participate in Jihad for Allah's cause.’”

Here, the father commented on what they have just heard on television : You see, the verse we have just heard from the Holy Quran has placed the obedience of parents second only to worshipping Allah. Here is another verse where the Almighty associates thanking Him with thanking parents, in recognition of Allah's favour and parents' kindness towards their children.

Allah Most High says :

> “And we have enjoined upon man concerning his parents - His mother beareth him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years - Give thanks unto Me and unto thy parents. Unto Me is the journeying.” (Luqman : 14).

Ahmed said : “ Concerning this verse, which some people may think implies that the mother has more rights than the father, I asked our religious studies teacher at school if the mother had more rights over the children than the father. He replied : ‘The father and mother have the same rights over their children. They should be obeyed and respected equally, but more affection and kindness is shown to the mother for her

sensitivity and tender - heartiness, and for her endurance during pregnancy, nursing and upbringing her children.'"

Ahmed continued saying : "The teacher mentioned this Hadith: 'A man came to the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, and said : 'O Messenger of Allah ! who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me ? The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, said : 'your mother.' The man said : 'Who is next ?' The Prophet said : 'Your mother' : The man finally said : 'Who is next ?' The Prophet said : 'Your mother' The man asked : 'Who is next ?' The Prophet said : 'your father'".

The mother has been repeated three times here to guide children to show more care and more concern to her.

Fatima then asked : "We often hear the Hadith which says 'Paradise is under the feet of mothers'. What does it really mean ?"

The father replied : "It means that the mother's prayer is answered and that entering and enjoying paradise can only be assured for those who please their mothers in what pleases Allah and His Prophet and who take good care of them when they reach old age, as long as he led a straight-forward life and asked forgivness for ill doings".

The father stopped for a while and then continued : "It is worth mentioning here that Islam seeks the harmony between different generations. What we do today will have

consequences on our children tomorrow. They, in turn, will show us care and respect in our old age only as much as we have ourselves shown our parents. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, says :‘Be Kind and dutiful to your parents, and your children will be kind and dutiful to you ’.

It goes without saying that whatever is said about parents is also true about grand parents for they are on equal footing with them.”

Here the mother said : “A few weeks ago, I read this story in a religious magazine which shows what awaits children who neglect their mothers: Imam Malik Ibn Anas* tells this story about Alqama, a strong, generous and pious young man. One day, he fell sick, so Umar, Ali, and Bilal, may Allah be pleased with them, paid him a visit. They found him dumbfounded, so he could not speak to them. When the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, heard about this, he called Alqama's mother and learned from her that she was angry with her son because he did not care enough about her. The Prophet, May Peace and Blessing he upon him, asked her to forgive her son, explaining to her that no prayer or alms-giving would help him as long as she was angry with him. The mother agreed to the Prophet's wish and forgave her son. The tongue of Alqama got loose. When the Prophet , may Peace and Blessing be upon

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* Imam Malik is one of the four famous Imams: Abu Hanifa Annu'man Bin Thabit, Malik Bin Anas, Muhammed Bin Idriss Al-Shafii and Ahmed Bin Hanbal.

him, heard this, he was happy and advised for more caring about mothers and for not preferring other people to them.”

Upon hearing this story, little Alaa smiled and said jokingly : “Mother makes good publicity for her”, and everybody laughed.

The father then said with a smile: “We talked this evening about being kind and dutiful to parents, but I am afraid you are going to forget to give your mother her present for the occasion.”

Upon hearing this, the mother said to her children : “My real present is your doing well at school and in life as a whole. This is what will make me happy.”

Fatima responded with these fine words : “Dear mother, we haven't forgotten the present. Our present is only symbolic, for whatever we offer you and our dear father will not be enough to express our love and respect for you both.”

The three children stood up, hugged their parents and kissed them lovingly. They presented them with the gift which they paid for together, and which included a card that reads :

Dear mother and father, May you always be happy and in good health. It is a great moment when a person stands in front of his mother and bows to her in respect to present her with a gift on this special day, as a token of love and gratitude. It is

the mother who has carried him in her body, gone through the pains of labour, and stayed up late at night by his side, sharing his joy and sorrow, and wishing he would be the best person on earth.

Our deepest love and gratitude to you both.
With our best wishes for a long and happy life.
Your children,
Alaa', Ahmed and Fatima.

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6. Neighbour's Rights

The days have gone by, and one evening, after the Maghrib prayer, a neighbour of Fatima's family Haj Ibrahim, who is a shopkeeper in the neighbourhood, fell sick all of a sudden. Fatima's father rushed to help him, accompanied him to hospital and stayed with him there until he felt assured about him.

The following day, during the usual family gathering that takes place after dinner and the Isha' prayer, Alaa' asked his father why he was so much interested in his neighbours, showing them so much love and respect, and always trying to help them and solve their occasional problems.

The father answered : “The family in Islam isn't closed on itself, nor does it live in a vacuum. It is an open family whose

ramifications extend to neighbours, to friends and to relatives in love, friendship and social harmony.”

Then he added : “And why shouldn't we be interested in our neighbours ? They are the closest people to us, closer even than our family members who live far away. They are close to us in time of ease as well as in time of difficulty. We find them by our sides on every occasion and they are ready to help us whenever we need them.

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, has commended us to be good to our neighbours for they deserve our love and respect. He said : ‘Let him who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement be generous to his neighbour, and let him who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement be generous to his guest, and let him who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement, either speak good or keep silent .’”

Ahmed responded : “I remember another Hadith which says : ‘Gabriel kept recommending me about treating neighbours kindly and politely, so much so that I thought he would order me to make them as my heirs’ .

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing he upon him, clearly shows the place of neighbours, as if Gabriel wanted to make them family members and inheritors of each other , so much close they are to each other.”

The mother congratulated her son Ahmed on what he has just said and added: “What you have said Ahmed is great. A neighbour, however, is not just some one who lives next door. He is also the person at school, in the classroom, in the factory, in the field, and even the passenger in a train, a car, or plane. Every one of them deserves to be shown care and respect. That way, people will live in harmony, loving and helping each other and showing one another the right path advocated by Islam. Of course this code of behaviour is to be adopted even when the neighbour is not a Muslim. A non Muslim neighbour of the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, used to harm him. One day he fell sick, so the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, paid him a visit to see how he was doing and prayed for him to recover soon. This impressed the man, and when he learned that Islam calls for forgiveness and for good behaviour toward neighbours, he embraced Islam and became one of the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them.”

Here Fatima spoke : “I have read many Hadith which speak about the rights of the neighbour. One of these Hadith says : ‘If (a neighbour) asks you for help, you help him ; if he asks you for assistance, you assist him ; if he gets sick, you visit him ; if some good happens to him, you congratulate him ; if ill befalls him, you console him, and do not build your house higher than his thus preventing him from the wind, unless he allows you to ’.

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, continues his advice concerning the neighbour, and commends doing the right actions which are bound to better the relationship between neighbours : ‘If you buy fruit offer him some ; if you decide not to, bring it home without him seeing it ; and let not your child go out with it so as not to vex his. Do not let the smell of your food reach him, unless you share it with him.’”

Ahmed then spoke and commented : “It is true that this noble Hadith has mentioned nearly all the rights of the neighbour and everything that is bound to strengthen the ties between Muslims so that they can make use of these commandments in their life.”

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7 - The Importance of the Family and Relatives in Islam

During one of the usual family gathering, the mother said : “I have read today in the newspaper a very good article on ‘the Family and relatives’. I liked it a lot”. Then she stood up to bring the newspaper. She read aloud the following excerpt :

‘Islam gives a great importance to relatives and pays good attention to their well-being. Relatives are relations by blood or marriage such as brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, wives, and husbands... These relatives are like wings to the family. They are the means of its strength in case of difficulty

and sorrow. This is why taking good care of them and paying attention to them is like doing so to the whole family. This action preserves the ties between all the family members.

Our true religion advises us to follow this behaviour in various Quranic verses, in the noble Hadith, and in the guidance of the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, to his kin, as well as in the guidance of the Prophet's companions, may Allah be pleased with them.

Allah the Almighty says :

‘And serve Allah. Ascribe nothing as partner unto Him. Show kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred’ (An Nisa' : 36).

This is a true commandment of our Lord for benevolence to kith and kin, which He links with His worship and the benevolence to parents. The Prophet , may Peace and Blessing be upon him, likewise says. ‘Whoever is pleased that his lease of life be prolonged, and that he be granted more wealth, then he should keep good deeds with his parents, and good relations with his kith and kin’.

This is a clear indication from our Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, that relatives should be treated kindly and kept good relations with. It is also an invitation that carries good tidings for all those who respond favourably to it. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, associated relatives to parents to indicate the strong relations between the different members of a single family.”

Ahmed asked at this stage :“And how can we be kind to our relatives ?”

The father replied : “We can be so by keeping in touch with them, inquiring about them and about how they are doing, visiting them from time to time and not keeping away from them for long. A long absence creates a gap which will be difficult to fill.

Keeping good relations with relatives also implies helping family members in need and supporting them financially and emotionally without hurting their feelings in any way. We should safeguard their honour and their feelings. The family is to be understood in its widest sense. The Holy Quran mentions this kind of conduct several times. Allah the Almighty says :

‘Lo. Allah enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk’ (An Nahl :90).

‘Give the kinsman his due’ (Al Isra': 26)."

Alaa’ asked his father :“And if the relative is not in need, what can we do ?”

The father replied :“If a relative is not in need, then paying him visits and asking about him from time to time is enough for this is an obligation. In some cases, it may be enough to inquire about relatives by phone so that the family members, whether living far or near, will not loose touch with each other.”

Fatima ventured this comment on what she has just heard :“We had a discussion in class today about relatives and caring about them. The teacher explained how the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, used to heed his kith and kin. He said that he paid great attention to his family and relatives, and that he was affectionate towards them, sharing their joy and sorrow, and helping those who needed help or consolation. In this respect, the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, said among other things :‘Let him who believes in Allah and the Day of the Judgement visit his kin’.

In spite of his affection for his kin, the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, used to warn them against relying on him or thinking that they are more special than others. Work is the only arbiter in accounting for one's deeds before Allah , for the Almighty says :

> “And that man hath only that for which he maketh effort”.
> (An-Najm :39).

Fatima stopped for a while, and then said :“The teacher gave us examples of how the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, used to care about his relatives. These examples are models to be followed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, was fond of his uncle Abbas, and used to seek his help in difficult moments. He used to say about him : ‘Abbas is like my father. He who hurts him, hurts me’. He was also fond of his uncle

Hamza and his aunt Safia. When his uncle Hamza died in the Battle of Uhud, he was deeply grieved.

In the Battle of Mu'ta which took place in the 8th year of the Hijra, the three leaders of the battle (Zaid Ibn Haritha, Jaafar Ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin, and Abdullah bin Rawaha) were killed. When the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, learned about this, he rushed to their homes to console their families. When he arrived at his cousin's home he asked to see his children. Once they were presented to him, he hugged and kissed them and his eyes became wet with tears. He comforted their mother Asma' bint Amees, and told his companions after he left : ‘Do not forget to cook a meal for the family of Jaafar. They are deeply grieved by the death of their bread-winner’(from that day, presenting food to the family of the deceased became a habit).

Asma' bint Amees mentioned the orphanage of her children to the Prophet who replied to her : ‘Are you afraid for their poverty and need while I’am their guardian in this life and the other !’”

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8 - The Family and its Role in Society

Fatima got home late from school today. Her mother was worried about her because she had never been late without having asked for permission to do so beforehand. She

apologized to her mother and informed her that the school director arranged for a meeting with some school girls after class to discuss with them what they could do during the summer holidays for the benefit of the environment and society.

The mother smiled and said : “I forgive you this time, dear, because this is a good action for the benefit of society and its development in many fields. This will be our topic of discussion this evening, Allah willing.”

That evening, in their regular family meeting, the mother talked about what the director of Fatima's school did and said:

“The school director has done a good job, which shows that she is an intelligent woman who loves her country. That way, the school becomes a living cell in the community and an active member working for its development, whether its contributions are small or large. What is important is that the school does not live behind closed doors and in isolation from society. The school is an integral part of society which is made up of different groups and families”.

The mother stopped for a while, then added: “It is important, therefore, that every family participates in doing its share of the work for the benefit of the society where it lives, to ensure its progress”.

Ahmed asked his mother :“And how can a Muslim family serve society ?”

Fatima replied : “A family can provide help in many ways. Each family chooses what it can do and volunteers for it. Assistance may be provided at the level of the neighbourhood, of the family, and later at a much broader level.”

Ahmed then asked :“And what can the family do for the neighbourhood ?”

The father replied : “A family can do many things. For example:

- It can diffuse health awareness among the children of the neighbourhood,
- It can diffuse an awareness programme of traffic rules and share in its execution,
- It can help in establishing workshops for both boys and girls,
- It can teach children how to read and write,
- It can help in protecting the environment and combating pollution.

Projects, as we said earlier, are many. What is important, of course, is to participate in them with sincerity so as to guarantee their success.”

The mother, then, spoke :“Some women in our neighbourhood have started a day nursery to cater for the children of working women. I have volunteered to participate in this project.”

Alaa' then explained that he has, together with his sister and brother, participated in several voluntary projects in the neighbourhood.

The father, likewise, said : “We have created in our area a new voluntary group whose aim is to collect Zakat and divide it among the needy. We have collected a lot of money which we shall distribute shortly. Part of this Zakat will go to the sick and the needy, and part of it will go to hospitals which render free health care to the poor”.

The father stopped for a moment, then added :“These co-operative actions stem from the essence of Islam which calls for co-operation and compassion to build the Islamic society and to spread the spirit of love and harmony among its members, so that a Muslim can help his brother to make his living, lessen his burden, and better his life. If a Muslim does not do that, he will become negligent towards himself and his society, and will not have performed his duties towards his fellow Muslims and non-Muslims. The Almighty says :

> “Help ye one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression. (Al Ma'idah :2).

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, says in this respect: ‘The believers, in their love and compassion to each other are like a single body : if one limb complains, the whole body responds in wakefulness and lever’

He also said : ‘Allah helps his servant as long as his servant helps his brother.’

Finally, the mother said :“I hope that Allah will help us and every Muslim family to perform our duties towards our society in the best way we can, so that a family could carry out a large part of its message in this world.”

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9 - Islam and the Ethics of Visits

This evening, Fatima's family did not hold their regular meeting. After the prayer of Al Asr, they went to a nearby village to call on a relative with whom they had agreed on the time of the visit by phone, well in advance. The relative welcomed them and insisted, that they stay with his family to have dinner together.

After the visit, and on their way back home, Alaa' began the conversation and said smiling :“It was a nice visit and the meal was good, but we missed your nice discussions, Daddy.”

The father smiled and took this opportunity to talk with his children about the value and ethics of visits in Islam. “Visiting friends and relatives” , he said, “is a sign of love and friendship. It is a good and useful habit which strengthens the ties between the family members and gives society force and power. Islam calls for these visits and asks that they should be

frequent as long as they take place in an atmosphere of true friendship, good deeds, and of conversing about useful things. Islam does, in fact, set guidelines for visits which should be beneficial to the guest as well as to the host."

Fatima added at this stage :"Our Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, invites us to receive our guests well when he says : 'Let him who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement, be generous to his guest.'"

Here, Ahmed asked : "And how can one be generous to one's guest ?"

Fatima replied: "There are many ways to be generous to a guest, for example : greeting him, being cheerful towards him, giving him a nice welcome, inviting him to sit in the best place, and being nice to him in the conversation, not letting him feel you are annoyed if his visit lasts long, and not to discuss with him things that do not interest him. When he leaves, we should always accompany him to the door, bid him farewell, and thank him for his visit and his interest in us."

Ahmed asked once again :"How about if it is us who visit others ?"

Fatima replied : "I have read a lot about this subject and learned that Islam advocates a moral code of visits, for example:

- Asking for permission: If we want to visit someone, we should first ask him if it is possible for us to do so. This should be done in the usual way by phone, for example. The time agreed upon for the visit should, of course, be respected,

- Asking for permission to enter the house. This is done by knocking at the door, ringing the bell, or voice-calling,

- Choosing a convenient time for the visit which should not take place when the host family is asleep, resting, eating - unless having been invited - or busy with their own work,

- Not to overstay the visit and to discuss only matters that are useful and beneficial".

The father then said : "It is also ethical for the caller not to insist if no one answers the door. He should leave without getting angry, for the family may be in a situation that does not allow them to receive visitors at that time.

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, says in this respect: 'If anyone of you asks for permission to enter three times, and the permission is not granted, then he should return'.

Allah the Almighty says :

'O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own without first announcing your presence and invoking

peace upon the folk thereof. That is better for you, that ye may be heedful. And if ye find no one therein, still enter not until permission hath been given. And if it be said unto you: Go away again, then go away for it is purer for you. Allah knoweth what ye do' (An Nur: 27-28).

The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, used to visit his friends, converse with them and be nice to their children. When it was time to leave, he bid them farewell and wished them well.

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10 - Islam's Call for Work

This evening when the family finished their prayer of Al Isha' and was getting ready for dinner, little Alaa' switched the television on for entertainment during the dinner. An eminent Islamic scholar was giving a quite interesting talk on the value of work and honest earning and their impact on the individual and society as a whole.

The scholar was saying : "A Muslim family is a busy one. It does not know laziness or indolence. It does everything in its power to become an active member of society by participating in the fields of production and growth, and advancing the wheel of progress in society. This is possible through serious work, and through seeking ways to make an

honest living, ways which agree with the principles of Islam and reject whatever is contrary to the precepts of our noble religion.

An ideal picture of a Muslim family shows :

-The father : he is the head and bread-winner of the family. His eyes are always kept on his children whom he takes good care of and advises properly.

- The mother : she takes care of her house and of her husband and children. She respects her husband, takes good care of his money, and visits his family and relatives. She makes sure that her children get the proper nourishment, stay clean and healthy, and that they get a good education. The mother, when highly educated, also contributes to the development of society by providing social and educational services. In this respect, the mother of the faitful Ayisha, may Allah be pleased with her, used to teach Muslims the principles of religion. Likewise, Nufeisa, a scion of the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, was famous for her great knowledge. Imam Shafii was one of her students.

- The children : they pay great attention to their schooling and do their homework with care. They follow their parents' advice and act well towards them. That way they ensure success to themselves and happiness and quietude to the whole family.

A Muslim family is not parsimonious nor does it live beyond its means. It does not make expenses that it cannot afford, so as not to put its bread-winner in a critical situation or compel him to mischief.”

Among the other things that the scholar talked about in his television programme is the obligation of every capable person to earn a living to satisfy his needs and those of his family in case he had one. The best earning, of course, is that which is arrived at by honest work which pleases Allah and his Prophet.

The speaker then mentioned several Quranic verses and noble Hadith which stress the value of work and call for the making of honest living, such as:

> ‘He it is who hath made the earth subservient unto you, so walk in the paths thereof and eat of His providence. And unto him will be the resurrection’ (Al Mulk : 15).

The Prophet , may Peace and Blessing be upon him, said: ‘The best food one eats is that which has been paid for by the fruit of one's labour. The Prophet Dawud used to eat from the earnings of his manual labour’.

He also said : ‘That some one of you should cut wood and carry it on his back, is better for him than asking some one for alms, which may be given him or refused.’

When the talk on television came to a close, the family had just finished its dinner. To start the usual family discussion the father praised the speaker and said : “I read some time ago, a story that shows the great interest the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, paid to work and to making an honest living, as well as to providing opportunities and help for those who can work.”

The father walked to a bookshelf and brought the story book. He began to read : ‘One day, a certain Ansari came to the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, and asked him for charity. The Prophet asked him: ‘Don't you have anything at home ?’ The Ansari answered : ‘We have some cloth, some of which we wear, and some of which we sit on, and a pot we use to drink’ The Prophet told the Ansari : ‘Bring them to me’.

When the man brought what he was asked, the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, asked those around him: ‘Who would buy these ?’ ‘I'll pay one dirham for them’, said one man. The Prophet then asked a couple of times. ‘Who will give more than one dirham ?’ ‘I'll pay two’, said another man. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, gave the man the cloth and the pot, and he gave the Ansari the two dirhams. ‘Buy for your family some food with this dirham, he told him ; with this other dirham buy an axe and bring it to me!

The Ansari did as he was told. When he brought the axe,

the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, made the axe suitable for chopping wood, and told the Ansari : ‘Go chop some wood and sell it. I shall see you in two weeks' time’.

So the man did as he was told and came back to see the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, having earned ten dirhams which he spent on cloth and food. The Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, told him: ‘This is better for you than begging which leaves a mark on the face on the Day of Judgement.”

Fatima said : “This is good advice from the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, who reminds us of the value of work and of keeping away from indolence and laziness.”

The mother added: “He also reminds us that there is no difference between one kind of work and another, as long as it is done in accordance with the religion and the law set by Muslim leaders. One should not say this job is great and this other one is miserable and mean ' as long as both are lawful and useful to society. A worker should not be deceitful but honest and truthful in his work, taking great pride in what he does, so that people will like his product and come back to him. As the Prophet, may Peace and blessing be upon him, says : 'Allah is pleased when someone does his job, and does it well”.

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11- Islam's Call for Knowledge

It is well-known that the youngest child in a family is the closest to his parents and the one who jokes with them most. The regular family meeting had barely begun this evening when Alaa' started poking fun at his father : “Come on Dad, show us your wallet. The teacher has asked us to buy some books to start a classroom library. Naturally, you are the best person to encourage culture. So, let us have some money”.

The father laughed and said : “your wish is granted, Alaa'. I will give you what you want in the morning. Your teacher is a great man because he encourages culture among his students.”

The mother commented : “A Muslim family is always striving for culture and trying to make most of it”.

Here Ahmed interrupted to ask : “What is culture ?”

The father replied : “Culture means being thoroughly acquainted with various aspects of knowledge, science and arts to be of benefit to man in his daily life”.

Ahmed asked again : “And why are Muslim families so much interested in culture ?”

The Father replied : “This is only natural. A Muslim family is always looking forward to what is better. Culture, of

course, opens the doors to science and knowledge in general. It helps in understanding man's condition, his ideas, his past and his projects for the future. That way, the family responds to the factors of progress and open-mindedness towards society. Without culture, man condemns himself to isolation from the world he lives in ”.

Fatima asked her father: “And how does one acquire culture ?”

The father answered : “Undoubtedly, reading remains the first means to get acquainted with the various aspects of culture. Reading allows us to be aware of the literary and scientific production of the past and the present. It allows us to discover what is in newspapers, magazines, and various other publications.

Other sources for acquiring culture are what we learn at school, from our popular cultural radio and television programmes, or by attending seminars and conferences held by different scientific and cultural institutions.”

The mother said : “Undoubtedly, a Muslim family in its keen drive to acquire knowledge and education draws upon the guidelines of Islam and its teachings as in the Holy Quran and the noble Hadith which urge Muslims to learn and acquire knowledge. Our Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him, was asked to read in the very first revelation of Allah to him.

The mother quoted from the first Surah of Al-Alaq:

"Read in the name of thy Lord Who created, Created man from a clot. Read : And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who taught by the pen, Taught man that which he knew not."

The following day, the father was happy to see his two children Ahmed and Alaa' come back home carrying a large pile of books which they had bought, on the advice of their mother and sister, in a bookshop nearby. This made the father think about their own home library. He felt that it needed to be rearranged so that it could be used more efficiently. Fatima and her mother were assigned the task of this rearrangement.

Thus, one evening, Fatima and her mother made a list of the books in their library and another list of the books that they needed to add to it. Few days later, the books were nicely rearranged in the bookshelf which they placed in a nice quiet corner of the house.

A large number of books and references in their home library were about Islam, the exegesis of the Holy Quran, the Hadith and the life of the Prophet, may Peace and Blessing be upon him. There were also books on the history of Islam, books on the life of important Muslim scholars and simplified books on science and history of science in the Muslim world, as well as recent books.

Further Reading

1. ***The Family in the Islamic Legislation***, by M. A F. Essanhouri

2. ***Readings in the Life of the Prophet*** , by A. H. Elbakori

3. ***The Organization of Society in Islam***, by M. Abu Zahra

4. ***Garden of the Virtuous***, by Al Imam Nawawi

5. ***Vivification of Religious Sciences***, by Al Imam Al Ghazali